ABSTRACT

Uganda ratified the Ramsar Convention in 1988 and since then the country has made significant progress in implementing the principles of the convention. Parties to the Ramsar Convention are expected to demonstrate their commitments to wetland management through three ‘pillars’ of action. – take – or sustainable – use of wetlands; identification of internationally important wetlands for inclusion in the Ramsar List; and the international cooperation and sharing of information and expertise. After agreeing to the treaty in 1988, Uganda listed the Lake George Ramsar site. A second site, Lake Nabugabo, was added to the list in February 2004. Since then, nine sites have been gazetted in September 2005. Today Uganda has eleven Ramsar sites covering a total area of 354,803 hectares. Uganda contains an extensive and varied wetlands network that covers around 13% (30,680 sq. km) of the country’s land area.

INTRODUCTION

Uganda is a landlocked country which lies directly on the equator in East-Central Africa and covers 236,000km² in size, an area comparable to the United Kingdom. Uganda contains an extensive and varied wetlands network that covers around 13% (30,680 sq. km) of the country’s land area. Most of these wetlands are products of the country’s four major lake systems: Victoria, Kyoga, Albert and the Edward/George basins. One summary (Vlsser 1995) catalogues them readily as lake edges, Nile shore swamps, and valley swamps. The reality is somewhat richer and more diverse, the latter category alone encompassing broad, shallow-rafted floodplains in the north of the country, the soggy bottomland of the deep, V-shaped valleys that straddle the Albertine rift, and the broad, alluvial floodplains of the Nile. These wetland systems are very diverse with many non-wetland species. The Ramsar Convention through Ramsar sites, being classified as international wetlands, is intended to conserve these species. The Ramsar sites are expected to demonstrate their commitments to wetland management through three pillars of action – take or sustainable use of wetlands, identification of internationally important wetlands for inclusion in the Ramsar List, and the international cooperation and sharing of information and expertise. Information presented in this paper comes from Nature Uganda’s work on wetland surveys and conservation, the important Bird Areas programme, the waterfowl counts monitoring reports and the Ramsar sites information sheets. Information has also been obtained from the wetlands Management department reports and the National Biodiversity data base distribution records.

METHODS

Information presented in this paper comes from Nature Uganda’s work on wetland surveys and conservation, the important Bird Areas programme, the waterfowl counts monitoring reports and the Ramsar sites information sheets. Information has also been obtained from the wetlands Management department reports and the National Biodiversity data base distribution records.

RESULTS

Identification of Ramsar sites

There are eleven Ramsar sites in Uganda (Fig. 1). They cover 354,803 ha which represents 12% of wetlands in Uganda and together the sites contain 87% of the total number of wetland species. These sites contain all species occurring in all Ramsar sites (Fig. 2) Lake Bisina, Lake Nakuwa, Nabajjuzi wetland, Mabamba Bay National Park. There has been more surveys in these sites and habitat diversity. Sites share similar bird species and 6 sites contain 87% of Ww species but 30 Ww species are not covered by the already designated Ramsar sites. Uganda has 190 regional red data species of which 56 are Ww species and 46 (82%) are recorded in the Ramsar sites.

Protection of globally threatened species

There are 48 IUCN red data species in Uganda of which 17 are wetland birds (Ww) species and 14 (62%) of Ww are recorded in the Ramsar sites and two of these are not recorded in a protected area. Although the Grauer’s Swamp Warbler, an Albertine Rift endemic is not recorded in any Ramsar sites, it however exists in protected area systems ie. Bwindi NP, Echuya FR and Mgahinga NP. Maccoa Duck is known from very few records in the Kyoga basin. The Ferruginous Duck also a pantropical migrant is known from two old records on Lake Albert and QEUP. Two species (Maccoa Duck and Baera Reed Warbler) are therefore of immediate concern and new Ramsar sites need to consider the coverage of such species and the 30 other wetland species.

Table 3. Wetland species that are globally threatened but not recorded in Ramsar sites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Threat status</th>
<th>Migration status</th>
<th>Current protection status</th>
<th>Probable area therapied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White-winged Black Terns at Lutembe Bay</td>
<td>Ww</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Vagrant</td>
<td>Not protected</td>
<td>Lake Kanyonyo, Kasese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maccoa Duck</td>
<td>Ww</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Vagrant</td>
<td>Not protected</td>
<td>Lake Kanyonyo, Kasese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grauer’s Swamp Warbler</td>
<td>Ww</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Vagrant</td>
<td>Not protected</td>
<td>Lake Kanyonyo, Kasese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferruginous Duck</td>
<td>Ww</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Vagrant</td>
<td>Not protected</td>
<td>Lake Kyoga basin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ramsar sites and the Protected Areas in Uganda

Uganda’s Ramsar sites can be categorised geographically as occurring in the following zones.

- Lake Victoria hinterland: Three sites are immediately adjacent to Lake Victoria. Sanga Bay, Luwero Bay and Mabamba Bay Ramsar sites contain wetlands on the shores of Lake Victoria, while the Lake Nabusugu site contains a series of small satellite lakes in the immediate hinterland.
- Lake Victoria: Two sites: Nabusugu and Lake Mbuya. The in the extensive swampy river systems of the Katonga and Bukoba/ Rusinga River which drain into the north-western part of Lake Victoria.
- Albertine Rift region: Two sites. Lake George and Murchison Falls. Albertina delta lies on the Albertine Rift Valley and the proposed Murchison Falls National Park which lies on marzens areas of the Albertine Rift.
- Lake Kyoga basin: Three sites. Lake Nakwero, Lake Bihwa and Lake Opeta; contain wetlands within tributary wetlands entering the eastern end of the Lake Kyoga basin.

There are only four Ramsar sites that are located within protected areas. These include the following:

- Lake Mbuwo-Nakivale Wetland System which occurs partly in Lake Mbuwo National Park but the Rambar site extends down stream to cover Lake Nakivale wetland.
- Lake George wetland occurs within Queen Elizabeth National Park and is fully protected. The main threats result from pollution mining in catchment.
- Murchison Falls Delta Wetland System is covered by Murchison Falls National Park along the Nile and the delta regions. However, the park does not cover the north section of Lake Albert which part of the Ramsar site. The area is threatened by proposed mining in Albertine graben.
- Rwenzori Mountain range occurs within Rwenzori Mts National Park. The major threat to this site will result from reduced glaciers which are the main source of water and tourism development.

CONCLUSION

There are eleven Ramsar sites covering 12% of wetlands in Uganda and together the sites contain 87% of the total number of wetland species in Uganda. The Ramsar sites also contain 14 (76%) of the 17 globally threatened wetland species and the remaining three species being non-wetland. In addition Ramsar sites are very diverse with many non-wetland species. The Ramsar Convention through Ramsar sites designation has contributed to the protection of species in Uganda.